

HEALTH IDENTIFIERS & SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

ALLERGIES

An allergy is a reaction of the immune system to a substance. The immune system helps the body fight viruses and bacteria and other harmful substances. An allergic reaction takes place when the immune system acts against things that are usually not harmful. These are called allergens. Allergies are also called allergic reactions.



SOME FACTS about Allergies

- Allergies are relatively **common**. About 2 out of every 10 adults has one type of allergy or another.
- There are many different kinds of **allergens** (substances that cause an allergic reaction). Different people have different allergies.
- Most of the time the **symptoms are mild** and result in discomfort (e.g., sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes).
- A reaction with a skin rash is sometimes called "**hives**."
- An allergic reaction to pollen is also called "**hayfever**."
- Some people have very severe allergic reactions that can quickly become life-threatening - this is an **anaphylactic reaction**.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

The allergic reaction will depend on what the allergen is and where it contacts the body. For example if you are allergic and you:

- **Touch** poison ivy, pine tree sap, soap or detergents, you get a skin rash
- Are **stung** by a bee (sting), you get swelling
- **Eat** shell fish, you get abdominal pain
- **Breath** in tree pollen, you sneeze, get itchy eyes and congestion

An **anaphylactic reaction** is an **EMERGENCY** – look for these signs and symptoms:

- Breathing Difficulty, Wheezing
- Slurring of Speech, Confusion
- Fainting or severe Dizziness
- Skin, lips or nails turn Blue



CAUSES

Allergic reactions are caused by contact with an allergen. Some common allergens include:

- **Food** – nuts, shell fish, milk, eggs and wheat
- **Plants** – poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac
- **Insects** – bee stings and spider bites
- **Medicines** – penicillin, sulfa drugs
- **Chemicals** – latex, perfumes, other chemicals
- **Airborne** – dust, animal dander, pollen, mold and mildew



PREVENTION

- **Ask questions:** It is very important that you know if the person has any allergies, what they are allergic to, and what their allergic response was.
- **Tell the doctor** if they have had an allergic reaction in the past to substances including medications
- **Avoid contact** with known allergens. Avoiding substances that are known to cause allergic reactions is the best way to prevent problems. For example: read labels, don't use anything that contains a known allergen, and avoid sources of known causes (cats, perfumes, foods).

Allergies



HEALTH FACT SHEET No. 2
Revised March 2008



WHAT TO DO

- **Observe person and document symptoms**
- **Give the person their prescribed medication(s) such as Benadryl**
- **Keep calm and treat the symptoms: have the person lay down and rest**
- **Apply an ice pack if there has been a sting or bite**



TELL THE DOCTOR

When you visit the doctor tell him or her if:

- There have been any previous allergic reactions to medications or other substances.
- If there are any problems with itchy eyes and/or sneezing.
- If there is ever any wheezing when breathing.
- If there are any itchy rashes.
- If there has ever been a severe allergic reaction that required a trip to the emergency room or the use of an EpiPen injection.
- If there is anything that may have triggered an allergic reaction.



WHAT NOT TO DO

- **DO NOT** have the person move around – keeping them calm and quiet will slow the reaction.
- **DO NOT** delay in calling for help – allergic reactions can happen quickly.
- **DO NOT** leave the person alone – they may pass out and need assistance.
- **DO Not** give any thing to eat or drink (unless it is Benadryl).



EMERGENCY

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY and seek medical care if you think a person is having an anaphylactic reaction.

**Don't waste any time – get help Immediately!
AND Give EpiPen if prescribed**

Obtain an EpiPen. An EpiPen is a shot of epinephrine, which can be given to a person who is having a bad allergic reaction. This would be ***prescribed by a doctor***. This should be kept near the person who has bad allergies all the time. **Learn** how to use the EpiPen, before it is needed.

SIGNS of an Anaphylactic Reaction:

- Breathing Difficulty
- Severe Wheezing
- Confusion
- Rapid or Weak Pulse
- Slurring of Speech
- Heart Palpitations
- Fainting or severe Dizziness
- Skin, lips or nails turn Blue
- Generalized hives



DOCUMENT

- If an individual you are assisting has an allergic reaction make sure you write it down. If the reaction is mild, let the doctor know at the next visit. If it is **moderate or severe let the doctor know right away**.
- If the allergic reaction requires EMERGENCY Medical Care file an Incident Report for Injury if required where the person lives and complete other documentation such as writing down a description in the logbook (or notebook depending upon where they live).



TO LEARN MORE – Go to these websites:

- <http://www.webmd.com/allergies>
- <http://www.allrefer.com/allergies>